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SUBJECT: Ambassador Meets with President Jammeh

CLASSIFIED BY: Barry L. Wells, Ambassador, State, Executive Office;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1.(SBU) SUMMARY: In what turned in to a two hour meeting on topics ranging from the AU Summit, regional issues, human rights, and the Middle East, President Jammeh highlighted both the positive and negative aspects of the bi-lateral relationship and continued to stress his deep respect and appreciation for America and President Barack Obama. "I want your government to know that I am not the monster you think I am," said President Jammeh in a meeting with AMB, convened at Jammeh's request. President Jammeh continued in what concluded to be "a declaration of his commitment to remain a true friend of the United States." President Jammeh stressed several times during the meeting that despite appearances, his friendship with Iran, Venezuela, and Cuba does not affect his willingness to continue a close partnership with the U.S. Unlike previous meetings when a number of ministers attended, Jammeh was joined only by Njogu Bah, newly-appointed Secretary General. END SUMMARY.

You ignore My Friends, I'll Ignore Yours

12. (C) President Jammeh said he wanted it to be very clear to the USG that his friendship with Cuba, Venezuela, and Iran does not in any way reflect that his government approves of all of their behaviors and principles. He gave the example of voting against Iran on the Security Council for Human Rights, despite their close relationship. He said he does not condone Iran's Human Rights record and told them so. President Jammeh stressed that "his friendship with Iran does not mean we always agree with them or that we have any intention of fighting against important U.S. interests. "I don't approve of your government always siding with your friend Israel," he said, "but I continue to value our relationship without reservation. Therefore you do the same, you ignore my friends, and I'll ignore yours.

3.(C) President Jammeh made several references lauding the efforts of President Obama and calling him "the solution to the world's problems." He said it pained him deeply to see the divide in America with groups of people criticizing Obama's efforts to abate the policy of isolationism in our foreign policy. The Ambassador pointed out that this is the democratic process at work where those with differing views have the opportunity to voice those views, even if they differ from those of the President.

Jammeh on Israel

4.(C) According to President Jammeh, the entire problem of the Middle East, rests on America's unconditional relationship and support to Israel. Jammeh relayed accounts of The Gambia's previous close relationship with Israel prior to Ariel Sharon and suggested that President Obama take a personal risk and shift America's relationship with Israel. He stressed that it is the only way to

bring peace to the Middle East. Jammeh again stressed "We have never been your enemy and will never be your enemy, but there are some things that we disagree on, and Israel is one of them."

President Jammeh on Homosexuality and Human Rights

5.(C) AMB suggested to President Jammeh that perception of him by outside observers could be attributed in large part to some of his more incendiary comments such as those related to human rights workers and "cutting off homosexual's heads". The President responded, "Yes I did make those comments but did I actually cut off anyone's head? Have I ever arrested anyone for being gay? No, but Senegal has arrested and imprisoned someone for being gay and they receive the MCC. There are gays here in The Gambia, I know that. But they live in secret and that is fine with me, as long as long as they go about their business in private we don't mind. But if you are talking about marrying in this country, that will never happen. We will never accept gays."

¶6. (C) The Ambassador briefed the President on the general issues contained in the Human Rights report which was not yet released, pointing out that there are criticisms in areas such as press freedom and treatment of homosexuals. Jammeh continued with a monologue on policies in France and Great Britain limiting religious dress in public and religious symbols. "Yes my comments were strong but what about those issues? Are those not outrageous comments and actions from the West? But when it comes from me, I look like monster for defending my country's religious beliefs." He ended this by saying that no one likes to be disliked and that he finds this baseless criticism to be painful. The Ambassador suggested that sometimes the choice of words can be left to interpretation and care should be taken when speaking in public.

Jammeh the Peace Maker

¶7. (U) President Jammeh seemed to be making a part confession-part plea for a better relationship with the U.S. He offered his assistance in mitigating tough conversations with difficult partners such as Iran and Venezuela and promised to be of great assistance. He reiterated an earlier claim that it was his influence with Qaddafi that resulted in Libya turning over the Lockerbie bomber for trial. He said that others had taken credit for solutions to some difficult problems in Africa at the AU, but he let them have the credit. He said the Muslim way is not to take credit for your good deeds, but to do things quietly. He also referred to his efforts in Guinea-Bissau and the recent successful re-building of relations with Senegal.

Comment

¶8. (C) President Jammeh in this meeting appeared to be unusually concerned with how the U.S. sees him. He said specifically that he had called the Ambassador in to reassure the US of his friendship. He repeated that he is not asking for anything or any assistance, but wants to be given respect. Either way, we have an opportunity to build on our constructive relationship with this majority Muslim country that has shown willingness to cooperate with us and has proven to be an influential key player in the region. Given the fragmented, ineffective opposition in The Gambia, Jammeh is likely to be re-elected to another 5 year term in the next Presidential election scheduled for September 2011.

WELLS